

Phasmids in the National Museum, Prague, Czech Republic

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Abstract

An outline of the phasmid collection in the Czech National Museum, Prague.

Key words

Phasmida, National Museum Prague.

My latest book (in press) includes a section on museum collections, with details on highlights for the phasmid enthusiast and guidance on how to undertake research; it indicates that there are many poorly known collections world-wide. Having visited numerous collections for my own research work, I hope to occasionally publish contributions to improve our knowledge of lesser known phasmid collections, in order to assist future researchers who would otherwise be unaware of the scope of such collections. The National Museum, Prague is a good example of a neglected collection which is not mentioned in my book because I only visited the museum in July 1998; the museum boasts a phasmid collection of moderate size.

Starting with the Národní Muzeum (National Museum) in the centre of Praha (Prague): this spectacular building is a well known landmark in this beautiful city, in an area which attracts numerous tourists. The collection on display to the public includes several large, showy phasmids (some incorrectly identified). It is necessary for the researcher to make an appointment to view the entomology collection not on public display, which is housed in a 17th century chateau at Kunratice, a suburb of Prague. This is easily reached using the efficient public transport service (metro line C to Kačerov, then bus 114 to Kunratice, a total journey of 30-40 minutes from Prague).

The phasmid collection is housed in 63, mainly medium-sized, rather dusty store boxes; there is some pest damage to the specimens. Each store box contains a variable number of specimens, from 1-40 or so, which are mainly unidentified. Where identified the names are often suspect or incorrect but, nevertheless, the material, from various countries, should be of interest to the specialist. It is likely that these specimens were purchased on behalf of the museum by previous curators, possibly in the late 1800's-early 1900's. In particular, phasmids from the following counties are well represented: New Guinea (no further data, probably pre-1900); Madagascar, environs of Rogez; Borneo e.g. leg. Vráz. Other material, in some cases only one or very few specimens, is from (details refer to original data details, although some countries are spelt differently or known by modern names, for example Tonkin = Vietnam): Argentina: Misiones St. Anna, leg. Dr. Cernosviltov; Australia; Brazil: Espirito Santo and Sao Paulo; Ceylon, leg. Schilling; Costa Rica; Kamerun: Victoria; Key Is.: Toeal Is; Malaysia: Gap, leg. Dr. Baum (very faded); Is. Nias; Paraguay, 1893, leg. Dr. P. Jordan; Singapore, leg. Dr. Baum (very faded); Tonkin.

There are many duplicates included, particular of Madagascan material. I was unsuccessful in locating type material of three species reported by Paris (1994) as most likely to be in the Prague collection [*Pseudophasma auriculatum*, *Phasma kheili*, *Phasma urazi* - all described by Bolívar (1896); no material was traced from the type locality - Cuenca de río Atalapo, Amazonas]. There are a few possible type specimens from Nord-Borneo, leg. Frühstorfer, and Tonkin: Than-Moi, 2-3000ft., iv-v, via. H. Rolle, Berlin, although there is no indication that these were examined by Brunner von Wattenwyl or Redtenbacher when compiling their monograph (1906-08). However, they cannot be completely ruled out, as Brunner and

Redtenbacher occasionally stated that part of the type series was in "coll. Frühstorfer" [*sic*]. The entomologist Hans Frühstorfer sold material to several museums, mainly in Europe and his familiar labels are present on the specimens, which have the same data as the type series. A comparison with the entry for *Calvisia ferruginea* Redtenbacher, 1908, in Brock's 1998 catalogue of type material in Vienna, for example, indicates that the female in Prague has exactly the same data as syntypes in Vienna and Brussels (Nord-Borneo, leg. Frühstorfer); the Prague collection contains a printed label with the species name, beneath the specimen: could this have originated from Redtenbacher returning identified material to Frühstorfer? Without any evidence to support this, it is not appropriate to regard the Prague specimens as syntypes and therefore, a list of possible type species is not provided here.

To sum up, this collection would be particularly useful for specialists researching the main faunal regions specified above. If the enthusiast times his or her visit carefully, it could also be linked with one of two insect fairs each year; if not, there are plenty of tourist attractions in Prague and other nearby towns.

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